



USTA Pacific Northwest Shines a light on Sportsmanship

On any given weekend, you will find tennis courts around the PNW buzzing with activity as tennis players; many of them playing a USTA League match or tournament, enjoy the opportunity to share the court with their friends, teammates, and fellow competitors. Most often, the play is fun and fair with little to no drama, but sometimes the heat of the battle gets the better of us and a great tennis match suddenly turns sideways.

To help players navigate these tricky moments on court, the USTA PNW is rolling out a new Sportsmanship Initiative in 2023. To find out more about this project, we sat down with Elece Fiocchi, the Managing Director of Provider Services for USTA PNW and Chris Merrill, the Regional League Coordinator for Southwest Washington, to ask them some questions.

Q: Why the focus on sportsmanship?

Elece: Because good sportsmanship shows respect for the game, our teammates, our opponents, and our tennis facilities. Tennis is about so much more than winning; we need to remind each other of that. Remember to have fun while competing, support our teammates, be gracious to our competitors, and always keep our composure. What a gift tennis is, don't let the opportunity pass you by to be a part of the good stuff.

Q: What can we expect to see in this new push for good sportsmanship?

Chris: We will be providing additional resources for our players so that they have the necessary tools to handle difficult situations when they do arise, but also more education will be offered to help prevent those situations that turn a fun match into one that is no longer fun.

As tennis players, we sometimes forget what makes our sport so great, and good sportsmanship is a huge part of that. Our expanded efforts on our social media platforms, our newsletter, signage at tennis facilities, and league websites will bring sportsmanship to the forefront of our conversation with all tennis players. Where in the past we may have celebrated winning teams, our focus will shift towards celebrating the true winners...those exhibiting exceptional sportsmanship.

Q: When it comes down to it, people still want to win and make it to Sectionals or Nationals. Do you think this initiative will make a difference?

Elece: Bringing sportsmanship to the forefront of the conversation and celebrating good sportsmanship will make a difference. The argument can be made that good sportsmanship drives success. Good sportsmanship means striving for greatness, never giving up, learning along the way, and celebrating battles. You can only be a champion with people to push you. Thank your opponents for making you better. The acts of great sportsmanship I have witnessed at the championship events are what everyone remembers the most.

Q: As a USTA PNW league player, how do I do a better job spreading good sportsmanship?

Chris: For most league players, this initiative will serve as a reminder to familiarize ourselves with the rules and regulations, including our understanding of [The Code](#), which serves to keep play fair and fun. Tennis players spend hours practicing our forehands, backhands, and serves. Practicing good sportsmanship is just as important. Good behavior and fair play is contagious and your actions on and off the court have an impact on others. Share your love for tennis and it will always come back to you.

Q: What should I do to recognize someone for great sportsmanship?

Elece: Thank them for being such a great example. Share the experience with others and with us! We want to hear these stories. Please take the time to fill out a short sportsmanship nomination form - click [here](#).

Q: What does good sportsmanship mean to you?

Chris: As a tennis player, good sportsmanship means everything. It is vital in protecting the integrity of our sport. Great sportsmanship is the foundation upon which tennis was built. It has always been about fair play first and foremost. Without good sportsmanship, tennis becomes less fun for everyone. I was fortunate to grow up when my tennis idols were the best examples of great sportsmanship. Rod Laver, Billie Jean King, Arthur Ashe, and Bjorn Borg, all provided me with examples of how I should act on the court. Later, Roger Federer,

Ash Barty, and Rafa Nadal continued that lesson for me. Good sportsmanship has always been a necessary part of the game for me, now I want to help others make it a part of their tennis games. I'm very fortunate to have this opportunity.

Q: What 3 tips do you have for players to help them prepare for their matches?

Chris: #1: Be mindful of your body language. It can set the mood for your match the minute you step foot on the court. Does it tell players, "I'm the Labrador Retriever, ready for a great, fun match?" Or does it say, "I'm the rattlesnake, coiled and ready to strike?"
#2: Applaud your opponents good play. "Nice Shot!" This helps keep the match positive.
#3: Remind yourself why you began to play tennis in the first place...because it was fun. So have fun!